

Jeff Jarvis's The Gutenberg Parenthesis: The Age of Print and Its Lessons for the Age of the Internet (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023)

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Review of Jeff Jarvis's *The Gutenberg Parenthesis: The Age of Print and Its Lessons for the Age of the Internet* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023)

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I recently read Julia Angwin's op-ed commentary "The Internet Is About to Get Much Worse" (dated September 23, 2023) at the website of the *New York Times*. According to her, artificial intelligence (A.I.) systems are about to make the Internet much worse. For-profit A.I. systems are positioned to profit from applications distributed via the Internet. Angwin says, "Authors are suing A.I. outfits, alleging that their books are included in the sites' training data. OpenAI has argued, in a separate proceeding, that the use of copyrighted data for training A.I. systems is legal under the 'fair use' provision of copyright law." But this interpretation of the "fair use" provision of copyright law is surely something to watch in the near future as A.I. applications continue to develop.

However, before copyright laws emerged in our Western cultural history, a general sense of commonplaces prevailed in our Western cultural history. The American Jesuit Renaissance specialist and cultural historian and pioneering media ecology theorist Walter J. Ong (1912-2003; Ph.D. in English, Harvard University, 1955) discusses the commonplace tradition in Western cultural history in his seminal 1967 book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (for specific page references to commonplaces, see the "Index" [p. 347; for Ong's comment on the historical development of copyright, see p. 54]), the expanded version of Ong's 1964 Terry Lectures at Yale University.

More recently, the American journalist Jeff Jarvis (born in 1954) discusses the historical development of copyright in our Western cultural history, among other things, in his new 2023 book *The Gutenberg Parenthesis: The Age of Print and Its Lessons for the Age of the Internet* (Bloomsbury Academic; for specific page references to copyright, see the "Index" [p. 307]; Jarvis refers, in passing, to Ong, pp. 136-137 and 140).

Wikipedia has an entry about Jeff Jarvis. However, as of September 30, 2023, it contains not a word about his new 2023 book. I have no idea why the entry has not been updated to include at least the title of Jarvis' new 2023 book, which came out at the end of June 2023, according to the publisher's information about the book.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff_Jarvis

In any event, for Jarvis in his new 2023 book, "The Age of Print" = "The Gutenberg Parenthesis." For Jarvis, "The Age of the Internet" has now succeeded the supposedly ended "Age of Print."

However, for me, modern printers are the direct descendants of the Gutenberg printing press that emerged in Europe in the mid-1450s – and that gave birth to the print culture in our Western cultural history that has not yet come to an end with our ubiquitous printers attached to our computers – from which we may print out materials from the Internet.

In any event, in Jarvis' new 2023 book, he has constructed an elaborate array of tiny tidbits of information that he has gleaned from studies of book history and other sources. For a sense of the scope of his tidbits, see the "Index" in his new 2023 book (pp. 305-318).

The most efficient way for me to provide you with an overview of Jarvis' new 2023 book is to provide you here with its "Contents" (pp. vii-viii) and the inclusive page range of each chapter:

Part I: "The Gutenberg Parenthesis"

Chapter 1: "The Parenthesis" (pp. 3-10).

Chapter 2: "Print's Assumptions" (pp. 11-16).

Chapter 3: "Trepidation" (pp. 17-22).

Part II: "Inside the Parenthesis"

Chapter 4: "What Came Before" (pp. 25-30).

Chapter 5: "How to Print" (pp. 31-40).

Chapter 6: "Gutenberg" (pp. 41-48).

Chapter 7: "After the Bible" (pp. 49-56).

Chapter 8: "Print Spreads" (pp. 57-63).

Chapter 9: "The Troubles" (pp. 65-73).

Chapter 10: "Creation with Print" (pp. 75-82).

Chapter 11: "The Birth of the Newspaper" (pp. 83-97).

Chapter 12: "Print Evolves: Until 1800" (pp. 99-103).

Chapter 13: "Aesthetics of Print" (pp. 105-114).

Chapter 14: "Steam and the Mechanization of Print" (pp. 115-121).

Chapter 15: "Electricity and the Industrialization of Print" (pp. 123-129).

Chapter 16: "The Meaning of It All" (pp. 131-143).

Part III: "Leaving the Parenthesis"

Chapter 17: "Conversation vs. Content" (pp. 147-172).

Chapter 18: "Death to the Mass" (pp. 173-194).

Chapter 19: "Creativity and Control" (pp. 195-222).

Chapter 20: "Institutional Revolutions" (pp. 223-237).

"Afterword: And What of the Book?" (pp. 239-246).

Acknowledgments (pp. 247-249).

Notes (pp. 251-278).

Bibliography (pp. 279-303).

Index (pp. 305-318).

As you can see, Jarvis' chapters are bite sized. In Jarvis' Chapter 1: "The Parenthesis," he says, "I celebrate the closing of the Mass Parenthesis [which closing he discusses in Chapter 18: "Death to the Mass"]. As for Gutenberg's Parenthesis, I do not cheer its end. Instead, I believe this is the moment to honor its existence and all it has brought us, and to learn from it as we enter a next age" (p. 10). In this way, Jarvis thus characterizes what he refers to in his book's subtitle as the "Lessons" of "The Age of Print" – as he discerns them with the help of scholars in book history and certain other sources. Fair enough. In Jarvis' Chapter 6: "Gutenberg," he says that we know comparatively little about Johan Gutenberg.

Now, the main title of Jarvis' new 2023 book calls to mind the main title of the Canadian Renaissance scholar and cultural historian and pioneering media ecology theorist – and

Catholic convert (in the spring of 1937) -- Marshall McLuhan's ambitious 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, we may wonder how Jarvis' 2023 account of the supposed "Lessons" of "The Age of Print" might compare with McLuhan's 1962 account. However, even though Jarvis' new 2023 book comes equipped with a comprehensive "Index" that we might use to compare his book to McLuhan's ambitious 1962 book, McLuhan's book does not come equipped with a comprehensive "Index" that we could use to construct a comparison. Let me explain why not.

On the page on the reverse of the "Contents" page in McLuhan's ambitious 1962, we find a kind of editorial by McLuhan in which he says, "The present book develops a mosaic or field approach to its problems" – which constitutes what he styles as "the galaxy or constellation of events upon which the present study concentrates [that] is itself a mosaic of perpetually interacting forms that have undergone kaleidoscopic transformation – particularly in our own time. With reference to the current transformation, the reader may find the end of the book, 'The Galaxy Reconfigured [or the Plight of Mass Man in an Individualist Society]' [pp. 265-279], the best prologue." However that may be, the book begins with a subsection titled "Prologue" (pp. 1-9). In the "Contents," the main body of McLuhan's book is listed as "The Gutenberg Galaxy" (pp. 11-263). In the "Contents," the other parts of the book are listed as "Bibliographic Index" (pp. 281-289) and "Index of Chapter Glosses" (pp. 291-295). In effect, what are referred to here as "Chapter Glosses" are subtitles of the bite sized subsections that make up the book. However, even though the "Bibliographic Index" is somewhat helpful in locating certain material in the book, a full-fledged "Index" of all proper names and topics in the book would still be a helpful addition to McLuhan's ambitious 1962 book. But absent such a comprehensive "Index" in his book, it would not be easy to compare his 1962 book with Jarvis' new 2023 book.

Now, McLuhan's 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* also does not include a comprehensive "Index." However, the 2003 critical edition of it, edited by W. Terrence Gordon (Ginkgo Press), does include both a "Subject Index" (pp. 593-603) and a "Name Index" (pp. 605-611).

In Jarvis' Chapter 13: "Aesthetics of Print" in his new 2023 book (pp. 105-114), he discusses the historical development of indexes in printed books (pp. 101-102 and 103; also see p. 7).

Now, Ong's former teacher, at Saint Louis University years ago (1939-1941 for Ong), and life-long friend Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980; Ph.D. in English, Cambridge University, 1943), who taught English at Saint Louis University from 1937 to 1944, appears somewhat frequently in Jarvis' new 2023 book (pp. 3, 4, 14, 33, 82, 97, 123, 128, 131, 133, 135-139, 146, 150, 180, 223, 231, and 240). However, despite Jarvis' frequent exact quotations of something McLuhan said, we may wonder just how well Jarvis understands McLuhan's thought in his ambitious 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* – in which, according to the "Bibliographic Index" (pp. 286-287), McLuhan refers to his former student Ong's various discussions of Ramism (pp. 104, 129, 146, 159-160, 162-163, 168, and 174-176).

Young Marshall McLuhan, fresh from his graduate studies in English at Cambridge University, taught English at Saint Louis University, the Jesuit university in the City of St. Louis, Missouri, from 1937 to 1944. As part of young Walter Ong's lengthy Jesuit formation, he did graduate studies in English and in philosophy (taught in Latin to Jesuit scholastics) at Saint Louis University from 1939 to 1941. Young McLuhan called young Ong's attention to Perry Miller's massively researched 1939 book *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* – in which Miller discusses the French Renaissance logician and educational reformer and Protestant

martyr Peter Ramus (1515-1572), whose work in logic dominated the curriculum at Harvard college (founded in 1636) and at Cambridge University (for specific page references to Ramus in Miller's 1939 book, see the "Index" [p. 528]).

Subsequently, after Ong had been ordained a priest and had completed his lengthy Jesuit formation, he proceeded to Harvard University to undertake his doctoral studies in English. Harvard's Americanist Perry Miller served as the director of Ong's massively researched study of logic and rhetoric from antiquity to Ramus, and beyond. In 1958, Harvard University Press published Ong's massive dissertation in two volumes:

(1) *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* – in Ramus and in the Age of Reason, mentioned above; and

(2) *Ramus and Talon Inventory*, Ong's briefly annotated listing of more than 750 volumes (in Latin) by Ramus, his allies, and his critics that Ong had tracked down in more than 100 libraries in the British Isles and Continental Europe – with the financial assistance of two Guggenheim Fellowships.

Ong's *Ramus and Talon Inventory* features the dedication: "For/ Herbert Marshall McLuhan/ who started all this" – meaning that McLuhan had started Ong's interest in Ramus. (Ong was based in a Jesuit residence in Paris for three years [November 17, 1950, to November 16, 1953].)

Now, I have discussed Ong's philosophical thought in his massively researched 1958 book *RMDD* in my somewhat lengthy *OEN* article "Walter J. Ong's Philosophical Thought" (dated September 20, 2020).

For further references concerning other studies of visuality, see the related items on visuality that I list in my 2017 resource document "A Concise Guide to Five Themes in Walter J. Ong's Thought, and Selected Related Works that is available online through the University of Minnesota's digital conservancy:

Now, in brief, Ong applied the centuries-old philosophical logion (in Latin) that whatever is in the intellectual was first in the senses to work out his account of the aural-to-visual shift in cognitive processing in our Western cultural history in his 1958 book *RMDD* (for specific page references to the aural-to-visual shift, see the "Index" [p. 396]). I have assumed that McLuhan was also familiar with that centuries-old philosophical logion and that he understood Ong's perceptive account of the aural-to-visual shift in cognitive processing in our Western cultural history.

However, I am not sure that Jarvis is familiar with the centuries-old philosophical logion – or that he understands Ong's account of the aural-to-visual shift in his 1958 book *RMDD* – or Ong's subsequent iterations of his breakthrough insight in his 1982 book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Methuen) – to which Jarvis refers (p. 265n.9).

Now, the English Renaissance poet and pamphleteer John Milton (1608-1674) studied Ramist logic at Cambridge University. Subsequently in his life, Milton wrote a textbook in logic based on Ramus' work (in Latin). Subsequently still, after Milton had become famous, he published his textbook in logic in 1672 (in Latin). In 1982, Ong and Charles J. Ermatinger published their

English translation of Milton's 1672 textbook in logic in volume eight of Yale's *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, edited by Maurice Kelley (pp. 139-405) – with an eloquent “Introduction” by Ong (pp. 144-207).

Ong's eloquent “Introduction” is reprinted as “Introduction to Milton's *Logic*” in volume four of Ong's *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1999, pp. 111-142). In Jarvis' new 2023 book, he discusses Milton (pp. 10 and 204-206) among many others in “The Age of Print.”

Now, in Philip Marchand's 1989 book *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger*, McLuhan's Canadian biographer makes an important point about Ong's thesis in his 1958 book *RMDD* and McLuhan's thesis in his ambitious 1962 book. Marchand says, “Tipped off by McLuhan, Ong later devoted years of research to Ramus and eventually produced his classic study, much quoted in McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, entitled *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*. It was while working on this book that Ong hit on the basic notion underlying *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, namely that Western culture in the Renaissance had shifted from a primarily auditory mode of apprehending reality to a primarily visual mode and that the vehicle for this shift was the invention of printing” (p. 59).

Subsequently, Marchand also says, “Amplifying Walter Ong's thesis [in his massively researched 1958 book *RMDD*], McLuhan [in his ambitious 1962 book] argued that the invention of print effected a still more profound transformation in the psyche of Western man [than had “the invention of the phonetic alphabet” in the West], leading to an emphasis on the visualization of knowledge and the subsequent development of rationalism, mechanistic science and industry, capitalism, nationalism, and so on. Laced throughout the text [of McLuhan's 1962 book] was material from McLuhan's [1943 Cambridge University] Ph.D. thesis, used as a kind of subtheme explaining how the printing press eventually de-emphasized traditional studies in rhetoric and grammar and brought logic and dialectics into prominence” (p. 155) – for example, in the curriculum at Harvard College and at Cambridge University.

McLuhan's 1943 Cambridge University doctoral dissertation was published posthumously, unrevised but with an editorial apparatus, as the 2006 book *The Classical Trivium: The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time*, edited by W. Terrence Gordon.

Now, in Jarvis' new 2023 book, he explicitly refers to McLuhan's ambitious 1962 book several times (pp. 265n.13; 265n.16; 266n.18; 266n.24;266n.25; and 266n.31). However, I have to wonder just how well Jarvis understands the visual/aural contrast that McLuhan works with in his ambitious 1962 book. Please don't misunderstand me here. I understand that Jarvis is free to put together his own accounts of “The Age of Print” and “The Age of the Internet.” In other words, Jarvis does not necessarily have to work with McLuhan's visual/aural contrast. Nevertheless, it strikes me that “The Age of the Internet” involves visual looking at screens, just as “The Age of Print” involves visual looking at printed text.

In any event, Ong published a generous review of McLuhan's ambitious 1962 book in the Jesuit-sponsored magazine *America* (1962); it is reprinted in *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (2002, pp. 307-308).

In Ong's review of McLuhan's ambitious 1962 book, he says, “McLuhan's voice is always the voice of the present calling into the past, a past that he teases into reacting ebulliently and

tellingly with present actuality in his readers' minds. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is concerned with changes in communications media, moving out of the past through our age into the future. Its axis is a huge assemblage of cultural phenomena – social, intellectual, political, and other – coincident with the appearance of typography” (2002, p. 307).

Ong also says, “The present work, like much of McLuhan’s utterance, is prophetic in the classical sense of this term. It is a result of a live realization of a truth that at least partially transcends immediate powers of utterance and that, as uttered, will affect hearers diversely. Those whose antennae are as sensitive as McLuhan’s will be overjoyed at his high degree of articulateness about a vast range of mysteriously linked cultural phenomena. Others, completely dominated by the habits of thought incident to the typographical society that McLuhan is standing off from and evaluating, will either be unable to make head or tail of what he is saying or will reject it with some show of hostility” (2002, p. 308).

In addition, Ong says, “If the human community is to retain meaningful possession of the knowledge it is accumulating, breakthroughs to syntheses of a new order are absolutely essential. McLuhan aids one such breakthrough into a new interiority, which will have to include studies of communication not merely as an adjunct or sequel to human knowledge, but as this knowledge’s form and condition” (Ong, 2002, p. 308).

Finally, Ong says, “What further syntheses lie ahead remains to be seen. But we shall have to work, as has the author of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, to open all the sweeping vistas we can” (2002, p. 308). Amen.

Like the author of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, Ong has “open[ed] all the sweeping vistas [he] can” in his own ambitious synthesis of a new order that he modestly titled *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, mentioned above. I am sorry to report, however, that few scholars in “Cultural and Religious History” have taken Ong’s “Prolegomena” as “Challenges for Further Inquiry” (the subtitle of the 2002 *Ong Reader*). Ah, but why not? Why haven’t more scholars responded to Ong’s “Challenges for Further Inquiry”? Is it possible that many scholars are still “completely dominated by the habits of thought incident to the typographic society that McLuhan is standing off from and evaluating”? If this is the case, does this mean that those scholars are not themselves willing to follow McLuhan’s example and stand off from the typographic society and evaluate it?

However, that may be, we should, in the spirit of giving credit where credit is due, give McLuhan credit for being able to stand off from and evaluate the habits of thought of the typographic society that emerged in our Western cultural history after the Gutenberg printing press emerged in Europe in the mid-1450s.

Because of my quarrel with Jarvis, I also need to wonder if the ubiquitous printers that we have connected to our computers and the visual apprehension we engage in when we use the Internet today do anything significant to somehow counter the habits of thought of the typographic society in Western culture that McLuhan somehow managed to stand off from and evaluate – or do they somehow strengthen those very habits of thought?

But Ong also gives McLuhan’s ambitious 1962 book as an utterance by McLuhan credit for

being “prophetic in the classical sense of the term” (2002, p. 308) – in the classical sense in which the ancient Hebrew prophet Amos was prophetic in his utterance. But I tend to think of the prophet Amos’ utterance as being about social justice. I also tend to think of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) as prophetic in the classical sense of the term in his utterances about social justice. But Marshall McLuhan did not speak out about social justice. But Ong credits McLuhan with being “prophetic in the classical sense of the term” that he operationally defines and explains as utterance that is “the result of live realization of truth that at least partially transcends immediate powers of utterance that, as uttered, will affect hearers diversely.” Is this how Ong would also describe not only the ancient prophet Amos, but also the historical Jesus?

For further discussion of the historical Jesus and his utterances, see my 9,000-word 2022 review essay “John Dominic Crossan on the Historical Jesus’ 93 Original Sayings [1994], and Walter J. Ong’s Thought” that is available online through the University of Minnesota’s digital conservancy.

In any event, McLuhan’s ambitious 1962 book helped catapult him to extraordinary fame in the 1960s. With the help of print journalists, he became a celebrity. At times, he seemed to be ubiquitous. No doubt he cooperated with journalists and others who wanted to help publicize his views – which sounded oracular. However, his growing fame attracted vociferous detractors – some of whom occasionally scored serious criticisms of his ambitious 1962 book. In comparatively short order in the 1960s, McLuhan had become the most widely known English professor in the English-speaking world. Even though McLuhan died in 1980, he is the most widely known academic in the twentieth century.

Ong acknowledged the serious criticisms of McLuhan’s 1962 in his 1967 encyclopedia entry “Literature, written transmission of” (complementing Albert B. Lord’s entry titled “Literature, oral transmission of”). It is reprinted as “Written Transmission of Literature” in *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry*, mentioned above (2002, pp. 331-344). In a “Bibliographic Note” elsewhere in it, the ever-tactful but ever-loyal Ong says, “McLuhan [in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*] gives a racy survey, indifferent to some scholarly detail, but uniquely valuable in suggesting the sweep and depth of the cultural and psychological changes entailed in the passage from illiteracy to print and beyond” (2002, p. 343).

Ong’s succinct criticism of McLuhan’s ambitious 1962 book is similar to the criticism of McLuhan that Jarvis quotes New York University’s Neil Postman as saying in Chapter 16: “The Meaning of It All” in his new 2023 book: “I would say McLuhan was a great thinker, but I wouldn’t say he was a great scholar, because I don’t think he had the patience to work out some of the implications of what he was saying. McLuhan’s questions were generally more interesting than his answers” (quoted on p. 139).

Jarvis himself is here quoting the quote of Postman in the article “Marshall McLuhan Is Back From the Dustbin of History; With the Internet, His Ideas Again Seem Ahead of the Time” by the journalist Alexander Stille in the *New York Times* (dated October 14, 2000).

Now, after McLuhan died in 1980, Ong published the fine tribute “McLuhan as Teacher: The Future is a Thing of the Past” in the *Journal of Communication* (Summer 1981); it is reprinted in volume one of Ong’s *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1992a, pp. 11-18).

For further discussion of Ong's views about being both backward-looking to the past and forward-looking to the future at the same time, see my recent review essay "Walter J. Ong on Being Both Backward-Looking and Forward-Looking at the Same Time" that is available online through the University of Minnesota's digital conservancy.

Now, after Ong died in 2003, the University of Chicago Press arranged to publish a new 2004 paperback edition of Ong's massively researched 1958 book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*, with a new "Foreword" by Adrian Johns (pp. v-xiii). On the back cover, we are told the following: "A canonical text for enthusiasts of media, Renaissance literature, and intellectual history, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* is an elegant review of the history of Ramist scholarship and his quarrels with Aristotle. A key influence on Marshall McLuhan, with whom Ong enjoys the status of honorary guru among technophiles, this challenging study remains the most detailed account of Ramus' method ever published."

For further discussion of Ong's massively researched 1958 book *RMDD*, see my *OEN* article "Walter J. Ong (1912-2003) on Peter Ramus (1515-1572)" (dated September 1, 2023).

Now, at the end of Jarvis' Chapter 12: "Print Evolves: Until 1800," he raises some important questions: "Now, on the web, we lose page numbers as we lose the sequential structure of content. Instead of turning pages, we click and browse among them, each of us taking distinct paths. Google will find anything. Addresses meant for human use – page numbers, chapter titles, tables of content, indexes – are replaced by addresses meant for computers: invisible metadata. Will this affect our cognition of our world? Will it make us less or more likely to expect order, more or less linear or circular in our thinking? It is far too soon to diagnose.

For a discussion of linear and circular thinking, see Donald L. Fixico's 2003 book *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World: American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge*. The classic study of circular thinking is Mircea Eliade's 1954 book *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, translated by Willard R. Trask (orig. French ed., 1949). Now, in Jarvis' Chapter 4: "What Comes Before [the Gutenberg Printing Press]," he highlights Paul Saenger's 1997 book *Space Between Word: The Origins of Silent*

Reading about the late medieval practice of silent reading. However, the development of the practice of leaving space between words also occasioned the rise of the issue of punctuation. Ong explored the issue of punctuation in his 1944 article "Historical Backgrounds of Elizabethan and Jacobean Punctuation Theory" in *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association* (pp. 349-360; it is reprinted in *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry*, mentioned above (2002, pp. 185-197).

Speaking of late medieval developments that subsequently turned out to be significant in the print culture that emerged in our Western cultural history after the Gutenberg printing press emerged in Europe in the mid-1450s, I would also call attention here to Ong's Chapter IV: "The Distant Background: Scholasticism and the Quantification of Thought" in his massively researched 1958 book *RMDD*, mentioned above (pp. 53-91).

Ong spells out the larger import of the quantification of thought in late medieval logic in his

1956 essay “System, Space, and Intellect in Renaissance Symbolism” that he reprinted in his 1962 book *The Barbarian Within: And Other Fugitive Essays and Studies* (pp. 68-87); it is also reprinted in volume three of Ong’s *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1995, pp. 9-27).

According to Ong, the larger import of the quantification of thought in late medieval logic is that it introduced a whole new mindset in our Western cultural history:

In this historical perspective, medieval scholastic logic appears as a kind of pre-mathematics, a subtle and unwitting preparation for the large-scale operations in quantitative modes of thinking which will characterize the modern world. In assessing the meaning of [medieval] scholasticism, one must keep in mind an important and astounding fact: in the whole history of the human mind, mathematics and mathematical physics come into their own, in a way which has changed the face of the earth and promises or threatens to change it even more, at only one place and time, that is, in Western Europe immediately after the [medieval] scholastic experience [in short, in print culture]. Elsewhere, no matter how advanced the culture on other scores, and even along mathematical lines, as in the case of the Babylonian, nothing like a real mathematical transformation of thinking takes place – not among the ancient Egyptians or Assyrians or Greeks or Romans, not among the peoples of India nor the Chinese nor the Japanese, not among the Aztecs or Mayas, not in Islam despite the promising beginnings there, any more than among the Tartars or the Avars or the Turks. These people can all now share the common scientific knowledge, but the scientific tradition itself which they share is not a merging of various parallel discoveries made by their various civilizations. **It represents a new state of mind.** However great contributions other civilizations may hereafter make to the tradition, our scientific world traces its origins back always to seventeenth and sixteenth century Europe [in short, to Copernicus and Galileo], to the place where for some three centuries and more the [medieval] arts course taught in universities and para-university schools had pounded into the heads of youth a study program consisting almost exclusively of a highly quantified logic and a companion physics, both taught on a scale and with an enthusiasm never approximated or even dreamt of in ancient academies (boldface emphasis here added by me; Ong, 1962, p. 72).

Now, in Jarvis’ Chapter 17: “Conversation vs. Content” in his new 2023 book, he comes very close to using the terms that Ong uses in the title of his massively researched 1958 book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* – in Ramus and in the Age of Reason, mentioned above. Jarvis says, “The conversational motif [Ong’s Art of Discourse] as well as the epistolary form eventually faded from print [as in Ramus’ Art of Reason]. Francois Rigolot blamed among others Montaigne for the ‘inward turn’ he took in his *Essays*. Montaigne very much believed in the value of dialogue [Ong’s Art of Discourse]: ‘To my taste, the most fruitful and most natural exercise of our minds is conversation. I find the practice of it the most delightful activity of our lives.’ Upon the death of his dear friend and conversationalist, Etienne de la Boetie, Montaigne chose to hold a conversation with himself, in writing. ‘Their lively discussions are nostalgically alluded to in many passages of the *Essais*, which pass themselves off as poor substitutes for the highest form of vanished dialogue,’ Rigolot explained. ‘Yet, Montaigne will try to preserve that

dialogical dimension in his *Essais*, by bringing together contradictory opinions, making them [the contradictory opinions] wrestle with each other.’ Nina Chordas said Montaigne’s turn inward, toward individuality, ‘gradually separated thought from the world of discourse [Ong’s Art of Discourse]. Without this grounding in speech as intrinsic to the process of reasoning, dialogue began to lose its *raison d’être*.’ Is this when print lost its conversational essence, with the evolution of the solitary, individual voice in soliloquy rather than dialogue?” (pp. 153-154).

However, I have no reason to suspect that Jarvis is familiar with Ong’s massively researched 1958 book *RMDD* – which Marshall McLuhan was familiar with when he wrote his ambitious 1962 book.

In conclusion, I do not see the discontinuity between “The Age of Print” and “The Age of the Internet” that Jarvis thematizes in his new 2023 book. We look at printed texts visually, and we look at computer screens visually. We have printers connected to our computers – which I see as modern-day descendants of the Gutenberg printing press that emerged in Europe in the 1450s. Nevertheless, I do find Jarvis’ fast-moving prose accessible, and I generally enjoyed his spirited polemical survey.

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